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(54) **MULTI-CORE AMPLIFICATION OPTICAL FIBER**

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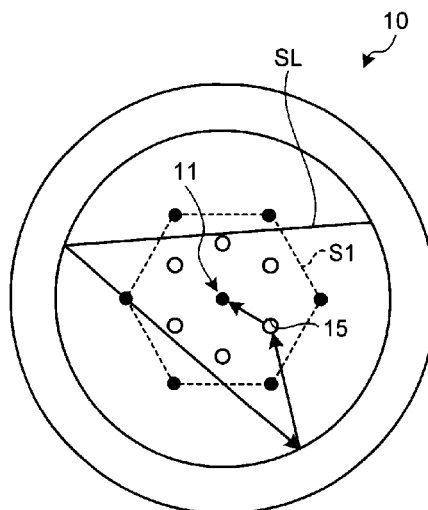
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A multi-core amplification optical fiber includes: a plurality of core portions doped with a rare-earth element; an inner cladding portion positioned at a periphery of the plurality of core portions, having a refractive index lower than a refractive index of the plurality of core portions, in which a first hole is formed; and an outer cladding layer positioned at a periphery of the inner cladding portion, having a refractive index lower than the refractive index of the inner cladding portion.

4 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets



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FIG.1

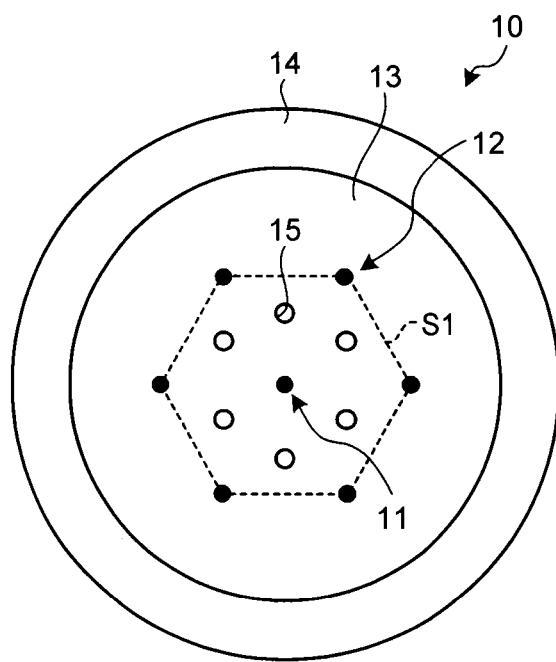


FIG.2

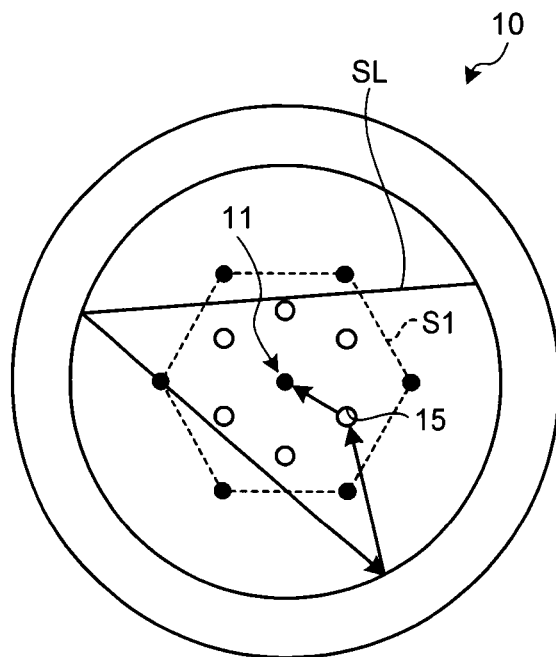


FIG.3

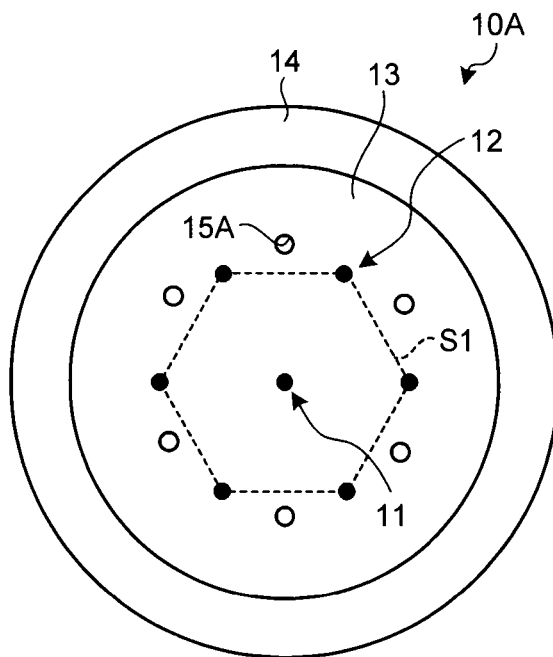


FIG.4

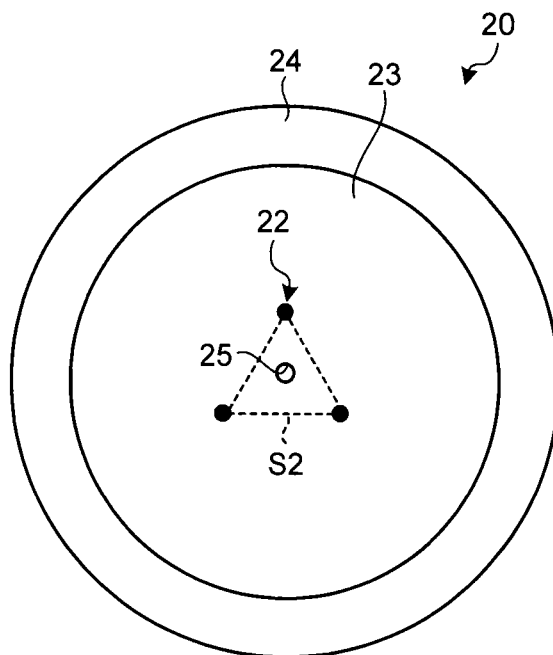


FIG.5

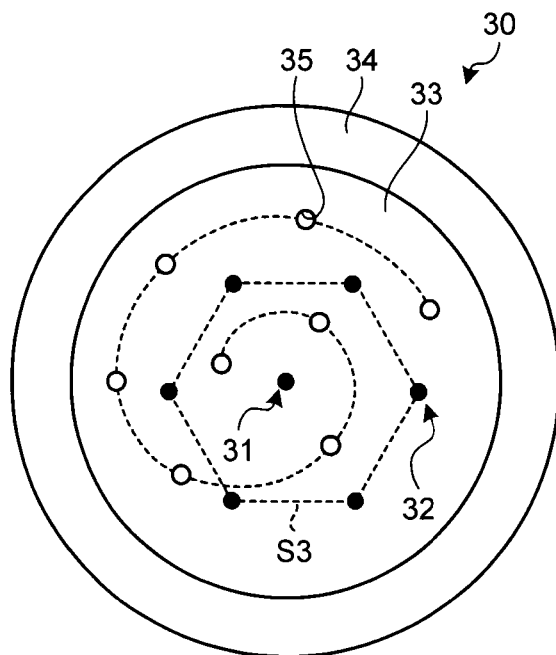


FIG.6

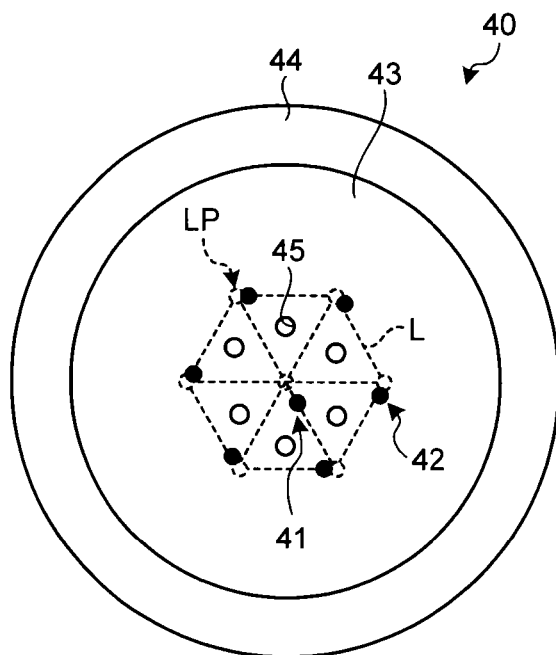
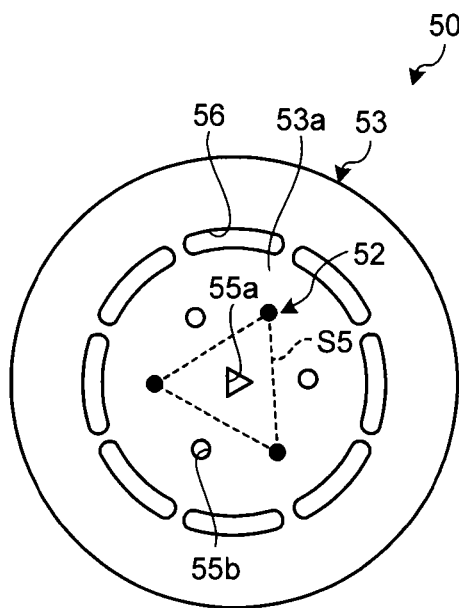


FIG. 7



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MULTI-CORE AMPLIFICATION OPTICAL FIBER

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION(S)

This application is a continuation of PCT International Application No. PCT/JP2012/064171 filed on May 31, 2012 which claims the benefit of priority from U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/497,784 filed on Jun. 16, 2011, the entire contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a multi-core amplification optical fiber.

2. Description of the Related Art

In order to cope with a rapid increase in a data transmission volume in recent years, a multi-core optical transmission line that uses a so-called multi-core optical fiber in which a plurality of core portions is arranged in the cladding of one optical fiber has been actively developed. Accordingly, development of a rare-earth-doped optical fiber amplifier for amplifying signal lights having propagated through the multi-core optical transmission line is requested.

For example, Japanese Laid-open Patent Publication No. 2005-19539 discloses a multi-core amplification optical fiber for an optical fiber laser, in which a plurality of rare-earth-doped core portions is disposed in the cladding. Moreover, Japanese Laid-open Patent Publication No. 10-125988 discloses a multi-core optical fiber amplifier for amplifying signal lights in a lump, the signal lights having propagated through a multi-core optical transmission line.

Meanwhile, some conventional rare-earth-doped amplification optical fibers in which one core portion is disposed near a central axis of an optical fiber employ a double-cladding structure. In the double-cladding structure, it is known that, when an inner cladding has a circular cross-sectional shape, a certain component (skew component) of a pumping light may not reach the core portion and does not contribute to pumping, and thus, pumping efficiency is not satisfactory. Therefore, a method of forming an inner cladding so as to have a star-shaped, polygonal, or D-shaped cross-section is used in order to disturb the skew component so as to be efficiently absorbed in the core portion (see Japanese Laid-open Patent Publication No. 2003-226540).

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to at least partially solve the problems in the conventional technology.

In accordance with one aspect of the present invention, a multi-core amplification optical fiber includes: a plurality of core portions doped with a rare-earth element; an inner cladding portion positioned at a periphery of the plurality of core portions, having a refractive index lower than a refractive index of the plurality of core portions, in which a first hole is formed; and an outer cladding layer positioned at a periphery of the inner cladding portion, having a refractive index lower than the refractive index of the inner cladding portion.

In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, a multi-core amplification optical fiber includes: a plurality of core portions doped with a rare-earth element; and a cladding portion positioned at a periphery of the plurality of core portions, having a refractive index lower than a refractive index of the plurality of core portions, in which a first hole and

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a plurality of second holes disposed so as to surround the plurality of core portions and the first hole are formed.

The above and other objects, features, advantages and technical and industrial significance of this invention will be better understood by reading the following detailed description of presently preferred embodiments of the invention, when considered in connection with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a schematic cross-sectional diagram of a multi-core amplification optical fiber according to a first embodiment;

FIG. 2 is a diagram illustrating an aspect of a skew component of a pumping light in the multi-core amplification optical fiber illustrated in FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a schematic cross-sectional diagram of a multi-core amplification optical fiber according to a modification of the first embodiment;

FIG. 4 is a schematic cross-sectional diagram of a multi-core amplification optical fiber according to a second embodiment;

FIG. 5 is a schematic cross-sectional diagram of a multi-core amplification optical fiber according to a third embodiment;

FIG. 6 is a schematic cross-sectional diagram of a multi-core amplification optical fiber according to a fourth embodiment; and

FIG. 7 is a schematic cross-sectional diagram of a multi-core amplification optical fiber according to a fifth embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Hereinafter, embodiments of a multi-core amplification optical fiber according to the present invention will be explained in detail with reference to the drawings. However, the present invention is not limited to these embodiments. Moreover, terms that are not particularly defined in the present specification are subject to the definitions and test methods in International Telecommunication Union (ITU-T) G.650.1.

In the multi-core amplification optical fiber, since the amounts of light used for pumping the plurality of core portions are not even due to the influence of the skew component or the like, there is a problem that the optical amplification characteristics of the respective core portions are not even.

In contrast, according to the embodiment described below, it is possible to provide an advantage that a multi-core amplification optical fiber in which fluctuation of the optical amplification characteristics of the respective core portions is suppressed.

FIG. 1 is a schematic cross-sectional diagram of a multi-core amplification optical fiber according to a first embodiment. As illustrated in FIG. 1, a multi-core amplification optical fiber 10 includes a core portion 11 positioned near a central axis of the fiber, six core portions 12 arranged around the core portion 11, an inner cladding portion 13 positioned at the periphery of the core portions 11 and 12, and an outer cladding layer 14 positioned at the periphery of the inner cladding portion 13. A plurality of holes 15, which are first holes, is formed in the inner cladding portion 13.

The inner cladding portion 13 has a refractive index lower than the refractive index of the core portions 11 and 12. The outer cladding layer 14 has a refractive index lower than the

refractive index of the inner cladding portion **13**. The core portions **11** and **12** are formed from silica-based glass doped with impurities that increase a refractive index, such as germanium (Ge). The inner cladding portion **13** is formed from pure silica glass that is not doped with refractive index-adjustment impurities, for example. The outer cladding layer **14** is formed from optical resin, for example. The refractive index of the optical resin is between 1.1 and 1.42, for example.

The seven core portions **11** and **12** are doped with a rare-earth element. Examples of the rare-earth element doped include erbium (Er), ytterbium (Yb), neodymium (Nd), and thulium (Tm). The amount of the rare-earth element doped is between 50 ppm and 2000 ppm for Er, for example. Moreover, the core portions **11** and **12** have a core diameter of 1 μm to 5 μm , and a relative refractive-index difference of 0.5% to 2.0% with respect to the inner cladding portion **13**. The core diameters or the relative refractive-index differences of the core portions **11** and **12** may be the same and may be different from each other.

The six core portions **12** are arranged so as to form an approximately regular hexagon around the core portion **11**. The core portions **11** and **12** are disposed on lattice points of a triangular lattice. The distance between the adjacent cores of the core portions **11** and **12** is set to such a core-to-core distance that crosstalk of light between cores does not have an adverse effect on the optical characteristics of the core portions **11** and **12** and that an extinction ratio, for example, is -30 dB or smaller. When the core portions **11** and **12** have a core diameter of 1 μm to 5 μm and a relative refractive-index difference of 0.5% to 2.0% to the inner cladding portion **13** as described above, the core-to-core distance is preferably 30 μm or more. Moreover, the core-to-core distance is preferably 60 μm or smaller because an outer diameter of the fiber does not increase too much and the outer diameter of the inner cladding portion **13** can be between approximately 125 μm and 250 μm .

The six holes **15** have a circular cross-sectional shape, and for example, a hole diameter is between 1 μm and 15 μm . The holes **15** are disposed so as to form a regular hexagon within a region **S1** that is surrounded by the core portions **12**. The hole diameters of the holes **15** may be the same and may be different from each other.

This multi-core amplification optical fiber **10** has a double-cladding structure. When a pumping light of a wavelength in an pumping band (for example, 0.98 μm band or 1.48 μm band for Er) of the rare-earth element is input to the inner cladding portion **13** while allowing signal lights of wavelengths in an amplification band (for example, 1.5 μm band for Er) of the rare-earth element to propagate through the core portions **11** and **12**, the pumping light pumps the rare-earth element doped into the core portions **11** and **12** while propagating in a state of being confined in the inner cladding portion **13**. As a result, the rare-earth element exhibits a light amplification effect and amplifies the lights propagating through the core portions **11** and **12**.

FIG. 2 is a diagram illustrating an aspect of a skew component of a pumping light in the multi-core amplification optical fiber illustrated in FIG. 1. In the multi-core amplification optical fiber **10**, a skew component SL included in the pumping light propagating through the inner cladding portion **13** propagates along an optical path that does not reach the core portion **11** at the center when the holes **15** are not present. However, the skew component SL reaches the core portion **11** at the center because the optical path is disturbed by the holes **15**.

In this manner, in the multi-core amplification optical fiber **10**, since the optical path of the skew component is disturbed due to the presence of the respective holes **15**, the fluctuation of the amount of pumping light used for pumping the respective core portions **11** and **12** is suppressed as compared to a case when the respective holes **15** are not present. Accordingly, in the multi-core amplification optical fiber **10**, the fluctuation of the optical amplification characteristics of the respective core portions **11** and **12** is suppressed. As a result, the optical amplification characteristics of the respective core portions **11** and **12** become more uniform.

Moreover, since the holes **15** are disposed in the region **S1** surrounded by the core portion **12**, the skew component of which the optical path is disturbed is likely to reach the core portion **11** which is positioned in the same region **S1** and of which the pumping efficiency is likely to decrease. Accordingly, it is possible to disturb the skew component so that the fluctuation of the amount of pumping light used for pumping the respective core portions **11** and **12** is suppressed more effectively.

FIG. 3 is a schematic cross-sectional diagram of a multi-core amplification optical fiber according to a modification of the first embodiment. As illustrated in FIG. 3, a multi-core amplification optical fiber **10A** is different from the multi-core amplification optical fiber **10** according to the first embodiment in that instead of the holes **15**, holes **15A** having the same diameter as the holes **15** are disposed in the inner cladding portion **13** so as to form a regular hexagon.

As in the multi-core amplification optical fiber **10A**, the holes **15A** may be disposed outside the region **S1** surrounded by the core portions **12**.

FIG. 4 is a schematic cross-sectional diagram of a multi-core amplification optical fiber according to a second embodiment. As illustrated in FIG. 4, a multi-core amplification optical fiber **20** includes three core portions **22**, an inner cladding portion **23** positioned at the periphery of the core portions **22**, and an outer cladding layer **24** positioned at the periphery of the inner cladding portion **23**. A hole **25**, which is a first hole, is formed in the inner cladding portion **23**.

The three core portions **22** are disposed on lattice points of a triangular lattice so as to form an approximately regular triangle. The hole **25** is disposed approximately at the center of a region **S2** that is surrounded by the core portions **22**.

The characteristics (for example, a constituent material, a size, a core-to-core distance, a relation of refractive indices, and the like) of the core portions **22**, the inner cladding portion **23**, the outer cladding layer **24**, and the hole **25** is the same as those of the corresponding elements of the first embodiment.

In this multi-core amplification optical fiber **20**, similarly to the multi-core amplification optical fiber **10**, since an optical path of a skew component is disturbed due to the presence of the hole **25**, the fluctuation of the amount of pumping light used for pumping the respective core portions is suppressed as compared to a case when the hole **25** is not present. As a result, the optical amplification characteristics of the respective core portions **22** become more uniform.

FIG. 5 is a schematic cross-sectional diagram of a multi-core amplification optical fiber according to a third embodiment. As illustrated in FIG. 5, a multi-core amplification optical fiber **30** includes seven core portions **31** and **32**, an inner cladding portion **33** positioned at the periphery of the core portions **31** and **32**, and an outer cladding layer **34** positioned at the periphery of the inner cladding portion **33**. Holes **35**, which are first holes, are formed in the inner cladding portion **33**.

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The six core portions **32** are disposed so as to form an approximately regular hexagon around the core portion **31**. The core portions **31** and **32** are disposed on lattice points of a triangular lattice.

The characteristics (for example, a constituent material, a size, a core-to-core distance, a relation of refractive indices, and the like) of the core portions **31** and **32**, the inner cladding portion **33**, the outer cladding layer **34**, and the holes **35** are the same as those of the corresponding elements of the first embodiment.

In this multi-core amplification optical fiber **30**, the holes **35** are disposed in a spiral form that extends outward from the inner side of a region **S3** surrounded by the core portions **32**. In this manner, in terms of the arrangement of the holes, it is not limited to a regular hexagonal shape but the holes may be arranged in various regular or irregular shapes. Moreover, the number of holes is not particularly limited, and one or plural holes may be formed. Preferably, the arrangement shape and the number of holes are appropriately set so that the skew component is disturbed in such a manner that the fluctuation of the optical amplification characteristics of the respective core portions is suppressed.

FIG. **6** is a schematic cross-sectional diagram of a multi-core amplification optical fiber according to a fourth embodiment. As illustrated in FIG. **6**, a multi-core amplification optical fiber **40** includes seven core portions **41** and **42**, an inner cladding portion **43** positioned at the periphery of the core portions **41** and **42**, and an outer cladding layer **44** positioned at the periphery of the inner cladding portion **43**. Holes **45**, which are first holes, are formed in the inner cladding portion **43**.

The characteristics (for example, a constituent material, a size, a core-to-core distance, a relation of refractive indices, and the like) of the core portions **41** and **42**, the inner cladding portion **43**, the outer cladding layer **44**, and the holes **45** are the same as those of the corresponding elements of the first embodiment.

Here, the seven core portions **41** and **42** are disposed at positions shifted from lattice points LP of a triangular lattice L. Moreover, the six holes **45** are disposed so as to form a regular hexagon in a region surrounded by the core portions **42**.

In this manner, the core portions may not necessarily be disposed on the lattice points of the triangular lattice but may be shifted from the lattice points. Since the core portions are arranged in such a low symmetrical arrangement, it is possible to suppress the fluctuation of the optical amplification characteristics of the respective core portions by the synergistic effect with the effect of disturbing the skew component by the holes.

When the core portions are shifted from the triangular lattice points, for example, the seven core portions may be disposed so that the core-to-core distance of at least one set of adjacent core portions is different from the core-to-core distance of the other core portions. In this case, a difference in the core-to-core distance is preferably 0.5 μm to 10 μm .

As a method of manufacturing a multi-core amplification optical fiber in which the positions of the core portions are shifted from the triangular lattice points, for example, a method of using the play of a glass rod or a glass tube stacked in a well-known stack-and-draw method, a method of using glass rods or glass tubes having different outer diameters, and other methods are known.

FIG. **7** is a schematic cross-sectional diagram of a multi-core amplification optical fiber according to a fifth embodiment. As illustrated in FIG. **7**, a multi-core amplification

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optical fiber **50** includes core portions **52** and a cladding portion **53** positioned at the periphery of the core portions **52**.

Holes **55a** and **55b**, which are first holes, are formed in the cladding portion **53**. Further, a plurality of holes **56**, which are second holes, is formed in the cladding portion **53** so as to surround the core portions **52** and the holes **55a** and **55b**. The holes **56** are elliptical and are bent in an arc shape.

In the multi-core amplification optical fiber **50**, due to the plurality of holes **56** functioning as an air cladding, a pumping light propagates in a state of being confined in an inner region **53a** of the cladding portion **53** surrounded by the holes **56**.

The three core portions **52** are disposed on lattice points of a triangular lattice so as to form an approximately regular triangle. The hole **55a** has a triangular cross-sectional shape and is disposed approximately at the center of a region **S5** surrounded by the core portions **52**. The holes **55b** have a circular cross-sectional shape and are disposed so as to form an approximately regular triangle outside the region **S5**. In this manner, the first hole is not limited to a hole having a circular cross-sectional shape but may have an elliptical shape or a polygonal cross-sectional shape such as a triangular shape.

The characteristics (for example, a constituent material, a size, a core-to-core distance, a relation of refractive indices, and the like) of the core portions **52** and the cladding portion **53** are the same as those of the corresponding elements of the first embodiment. The cross-sectional areas of the holes **55a** and **55b** are approximately the same as a cross-sectional area of a hole that has a circular cross-sectional shape and has a hole diameter of 1 μm to 15 μm and.

In the multi-core amplification optical fiber **50**, since an optical path of a skew component of a pumping light generated in the inner region **53a** is disturbed by the holes **55a** and **55b**, the optical amplification characteristics of the respective core portions **52** become more uniform.

The present invention is not limited to the embodiments described above. The present invention also includes one in which the respective constituent components described above are appropriately combined. For example, the core portions in the fifth embodiment illustrated in FIG. **7** may be shifted from the triangular lattice points. Moreover, new advantages and modifications can easily occur to those skilled in the art. Thus, broader aspects of the present invention are not limited to the embodiments and various changes can be made.

As described above, the multi-core amplification optical fiber according to the present invention is suitable for use in optical communication.

Although the invention has been described with respect to specific embodiments for a complete and clear disclosure, the appended claims are not to be thus limited but are to be construed as embodying all modifications and alternative constructions that may occur to one skilled in the art that fairly fall within the basic teaching herein set forth.

What is claimed is:

1. A multi-core amplification optical fiber comprising:
 - a plurality of core portions doped with a rare-earth element; and
 - a cladding portion positioned at a periphery of the plurality of core portions, the cladding portion having a refractive index lower than a refractive index of the plurality of core portions, wherein
 - a distance between adjacent core portions included in the plurality of core portions is set to such a core-to-core distance that crosstalk of light between cores does not have an effect on the optical characteristics of the adjacent core portions to each other,

the number of the core portions included in the plurality of core portions is three or more, and
a difference between the core-to-core distances of the at least one set of the adjacent core portions and the core-to-core distances of the other core portions is 0.5 μm to 10 μm . 5

2. The multi-core amplification optical fiber according to claim 1, wherein a hole is disposed in a region surrounded by the plurality of core portions in a cross-section of the multi-core amplification optical fiber. 10

3. The multi-core amplification optical fiber according to claim 1, wherein a first hole is formed in the cladding portion, the first hole being disposed in a region surrounded by the plurality of core portions in the cross-section of the multi-core amplification optical fiber. 15

4. The multi-core amplification optical fiber according to claim 1, wherein the cladding portion comprises:
an inner cladding portion; and
an outer cladding portion positioned at a periphery of the inner cladding portion, the outer cladding portion having a refractive index lower than a refractive index of the inner cladding portion. 20

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